

“Through the Obedience of the One”

Sermons on Romans # 12

Texts: Romans 5:12-21; Genesis 3:1-19

Earlier in Romans, Paul spoke about the gravity of human sin and its impact upon the human race. Paul’s assessment of the human condition is bleak: “there is no one righteous, no not one. All have turned away.” But Paul has also spoken of the way in which ungodly sinners (including Jew and Gentile) are delivered from their sins through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In Romans 5:12-21, Paul will deal with the source of human sin (Adam) as well as contrast Adam with that one who undid the consequences of Adam’s sin (Jesus Christ—the second Adam).

If the first eleven verses of Romans 5 were packed with important theological terms, the last ten verses of Romans 5 deal with two of the key figures in the drama of redemption—the first of the human race and the savior of the human race. The first man, Adam, is both the biological as well as the federal head of the human race and our representative before God. Adam served in both of these capacities during a time of probation in Eden under terms of the covenant of works. In Genesis 3 (our Old Testament lesson) we read of how Adam’s probation turned out—not very well. As the Puritans used to say “in Adam’s fall, sinned we all.”

But death is not the final word for God’s people. Where sin abounds, grace super-abounds! As the second Adam, Jesus Christ stands as the living head and federal representative of all those redeemed and justified, all those whom the father had chosen in Christ, and for whom he performs his priestly work. Throughout Romans 5:12-21, Jesus is depicted by Paul as the second Adam, whose perfect obedience unto death (unlike the disobedience of the first Adam), effectively overturns the sentence of death which now hangs over the human race as a result of Adam’s fall into sin.

While this is a very important passage, doctrinally speaking, it is also one of the most widely interpreted. The key point is the meaning of the phrase in verse 12, “*because all sinned.*” A brief word about the structure of the passage and the subsequent history of its interpretation is necessary. The main point of contention can be seen by looking at any modern English translation of this passage. Verse 12 ends with a dash, indicating that Paul breaks off in mid-thought in verses 13-17 to explain what he just said. It is not until verse 18 that Paul returns to and completes the thought broken off in mid-sentence in verse 12. Keeping this in mind is important to understand the passage correctly.

There are four major interpretations of the key phrase in this text “*because all sinned*” (v. 12), and all of them have exercised a significant influence upon the history of the Christian theology.¹ One of the oldest and most influential views is that of Pelagius (the arch-opponent of Augustine), who argued that what is in view when Paul says “*because all sinned*” is actual sin only.² Since the wages of sin is death, we all die because we all commit acts of sin. According to this view, our connection to Adam is historical.

¹ See John Murray’s fine study: The Imputation of Adam’s Sin (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co, 1979), pp. 9-21.

² Cf. Gerald Bray, ed., Romans: Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Vol. VI (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), pp. 134 ff.

When Adam rebelled against God, he introduced sin into the world. All subsequent human sin is an imitation of Adam's act of rebellion. We follow in the steps of our first father and we sin, just as he did.

While this view does justice to the fact that we are all guilty for our own sins, it fails to explain the contrast Paul makes throughout these verses between Adam's sin and the second Adam's obedience.³ The havoc wrought by Adam's disobedience is undone by the second Adam's obedience. The Pelagian must be consistent here. If we cannot be held responsible for Adam's act of rebellion, neither can we be reckoned as righteousness because of the righteousness of another (Christ). The non-imputation of Adam's sin is a two-edged sword. Yet another problem with this view is that it cannot explain the tragic fact of infant death.⁴ According to Pelagius, infants are innocent until they are mature enough to commit acts of sin. But if they are innocent and too immature to commit sin, why, then, do they tragically die? Death is not natural. Paul says that it is a consequence of sin. Whose sin? Certainly not their own.

The second main view is that known as semi-Pelagianism, which has come to be known as "Roman Catholic view," but is also held by many Wesleyans and Arminians.⁵ According to semi-Pelagians, when Paul says "all have sinned," he is speaking of our own actual sins which come about because we inherit a sinful nature from Adam, giving us a bent toward evil. This evil bent is known in Roman Catholic theology as "concupiscence," a pull toward our fallen nature. But this interpretation fails on exegetical grounds because throughout the passage, Paul attributes guilt to the entire human race to Adam's act of rebellion, not to the actual sins of Adam's children.⁶ For Paul, the sinful nature (flesh) entails much more than a mere bent toward evil. Because we are born with a sinful nature, we are "totally depraved" as our tradition puts it. We are guilty before God and unable to do any good. We are not merely "sickened" by sin. Paul says, we are dead in sin and transgression (cf. Ephesians 2:1; Colossians 2:13).

A third view is that of Calvin, which is a modification of the semi-Pelagian view. According to Calvin, Paul is speaking of actual sins, based upon an inherited corruption from Adam. But this inherited corruption is not merely a tendency toward sin (as the semi-Pelagians speak). This corruption amounts to

³ Murray, The Imputation of Adam's Sin, p. 10. According to Murray, "the syntax of verse 12 cannot of itself be pleaded as a conclusive argument against the Pelagian view. There are however, conclusive objections on a factual, exegetical, and theological grounds." Charles Cranfield notes that: "We may recognize in it [the Pelagian view] the intention of doing justice to a vital element of the truth which certainly ought not be obscured, namely, that we all are ourselves responsible for our own re-enactment of Adam's sin....[However it], must surely be rejected on the grounds that it reduces the scope of the analogy between Christ and Adam to such an extent as to virtually empty it of real significance, and fails to do justice to the thought of vv. 18 and 19 and to that solidarity of men with Adam which is clearly expressed in I Cor 15.22." See Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.277.

⁴ Murray, The Imputation of Adam's Sin, p. 10. According to Murray, "the Pelagian view is not actually or historically true. Not all die because they actually and voluntarily sin. Infants die. But they have not *actually* transgressed after the similitude of Adam's transgression."

⁵ Murray, The Imputation of Adam's Sin, pp. 12 ff.

⁶ Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, pp. 231-232.

total depravity and brings Adam's fallen children under the judgment of God.⁷ While a major improvement over the semi-Pelagian view, Calvin's view fails to account for the fact that Paul's point is that we are not only totally depraved and deserving of God's judgment, but that we are also guilty for Adam's act of rebellion. It is Adam's sin which brought condemnation upon the entire human race.

The fourth view is the historic Protestant view, in which it is held that "because all sinned" refers to the guilt of Adam's sin which is imputed (reckoned or credited) to all of his descendants. In this view, Adam is the federal head of the human race, the guilt of whose sin is imputed or credited to all those whom he represents under the covenant of works (which is the entire human race). This is the point of Paul's analogy between the first Adam and the second Adam. It is Jesus Christ who fulfills that covenant of works which the first Adam disobeyed. Christ's perfect obedience is imputed to all those he represents under the covenant of grace. Adam stands as the biological and federal head of the human race under the covenant of works bringing universal condemnation to the human race. Jesus Christ is the mediator of the covenant of grace, bringing God's superabounding grace to all those whom he intends to save.

With this historical background in mind, let us turn to our text, Romans 5:12-21.

With this historical background in mind, let us turn to our text, Romans 5:12-21. In Romans 5:12, Paul writes, "*Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.*" The verse begins with a conjunction [*dia*], "therefore," which alerts us that Paul is making a new point, that grows out of his prior discussion of reconciliation. As Paul has told us in Romans 5:10, Christ's cross brought about reconciliation between God and sinners by removing the ground of estrangement between the two parties—our sin. Had there been no fall of the human race into sin, there would be no need for reconciliation. Because of human sin, there must be a reconciliation if any are to be saved from the wrath of God.⁸ But where does human sin come from? Why are God and humanity estranged?

As Nygren points out, Paul's thoughts pour out here like a torrential mountain stream as he sets out the grand panorama of redemptive history.⁹ Paul is now dealing with the fundamental issue underlying his earlier discussion of human sinfulness in Romans 1:18-3:20, as he explains the origin of the enmity (hatred) that exists between God and man and which must be done away with by the cross. To do so, Paul pushes us back to the first man and the historical fall in Eden: "*sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men.*" If the fallen human race lies under the wrath of God, it does so because of the sin and rebellion of the first man, Adam. Adam is not only the head of the covenant of works, he is that one in whom the entire human race is identified and, in whom, we suffer the curse of sin and its wages, which is death.

Eschatologically speaking, Adam is also the representative of this present evil age and in the one in whom we are all under the dominion of sin. In Paul's analogy, all those Adam represents are under God's wrath.¹⁰ In Adam we all die. Therefore, Paul can say that sin entered through the action of the

⁷ Calvin, The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians, p. 111.

⁸ Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 228.

⁹ Nygren, Commentary on Romans, p. 207.

¹⁰ Nygren, Commentary on Romans, pp. 206 ff.

one man. This means that sin is not natural to human nature. Sin is the corruption of human nature. Sin is not the inevitable consequence of human finitude or limitation. Sin is the direct consequence of the fall. And there are horrible consequences of our sin—death. Even as human sin is the result of the fall, so too is death. Death results from sin and not from human limitation.

It has been said the only certainties in life are death and taxes. That may be true, but both are the result from the fall. We must be clear here. Death is the fruit of Adam's disobedience and the consequence of the fall and human sin. This is why Paul places so much stress upon the resurrection of the body as the climax of redemption. Jesus not only dies on the cross to effect our reconciliation to God and to redeem us from the guilt of our sins, but Jesus rises again from the dead as the first fruits of a great harvest in which we too will be bodily raised from the dead at the end of the age. When we speak of sin and death as a result of the fall, we must understand that our final salvation entails deliverance from sin and *all* of its horrible consequences, including the redemption of our bodies.

This brings us to the critical phrase, "*because all sinned.*" What does Paul mean by this? Actual sins only? Actual sin which springs from our inherent depravity? Or does Paul mean that we all sinned in Adam, since Adam was our representative under the covenant of works, in effect, acting on behalf of all those whom he represents. For a number of reasons the latter view is certainly correct. Throughout the analogy, Paul argues that death holds sway over the entire human race without exception. If death is universal, the cause of death (sin) must also be universal. Adam represents not just himself, but the entire human race of which he is the head. Then in verses 15-19, Paul will make it clear that death comes to the entire human race through the trespass of the one man, Adam, not through the actual sins of Adam's descendants. As Paul puts it in verse 19, through the disobedience of the one man, the many were made—in the sense of being constituted or regarded—sinners.¹¹

When Paul says "because all sinned," this does not refer to individual sins that we commit, nor to the inherited moral corruption or concupiscence passed on by natural generation from Adam to all of his children—although this is certainly a consequence of Adam's sin. Rather, when Paul says "because all sinned," he is referring to the fact that Adam is the federal (or representative) head of the race. Since Adam represented all of his descendants under the covenant of works, all humanity descended from him has sinned in and with Adam, with the guilt of Adam's sin being imputed to all of humanity. Adam's disobedience includes the guilt from Adam's sin as well as the subsequent moral corruption received through natural generation. In turn, this inherited moral corruption becomes the basis for the actual sins that we commit. This is what we mean by the expression "original sin."¹² We are all constituted sinners

¹¹ Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 240.

¹² Cf. Murray, The Imputation of Adam's Sin, pp. 71-95. According to Herman Ridderbos, "One man has given sin access into the world; he has, as it were, opened the gate of the world to sin. So sin has entered in, here represented as a personified power (cf. v. 21); through and with sin death has come in as the inseparable follower and companion of sin. The words then follow: 'and so [i.e., along this way opened by the one man] death passed on to all men, for the reason that all sinned.' The final words give a further explanation as to how death, through one man has passed and could pass to all men. This happened because 'all sinned,' namely, on account of their connection with the one man; therefore Adam's sin was the sin of all, and that in this sense it can hold for them that they all sinned. The union of all with and in the one, is...the governing idea of this [section], and it is in that idea that Paul indicates the typical significance of Adam with respect to the Coming One." See, Ridderbos, Paul: An Outline of His

by Adam's fall, and because we are constituted sinners, we do what comes naturally to us, we sin!

There is a good reason why modern English versions of the Bible end verse 12 with a dash. Leaving the sentence uncompleted until verse 18, Paul excitedly breaks off in mid-thought to explain what he has just said about sin and death, and our connection to them. How do these things fit into the course of redemptive history? Paul now digresses two times in the next five verses. The first digression is found in verses 13-14, where Paul leaves condition at the end of v. 12 hanging, to offer an explanation for sin and death. He will digress again in verses 15-17 to illustrate the huge contrast between what Adam's disobedience has brought, with the blessing Christ's obedience has accomplished! Paul's breaking off his thought in verse 12 and digressing two times, has led to the differences among Paul's interpreters.

In verses 13-14, Paul writes, "*for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come.*" These verses raise an obvious problem. According to Romans 4:15, people cannot be law breakers if there is no law to break! Despite this, Paul says, sin was present in the world from the time of Adam until the time of Moses. How can this be, if there was no law until the time of Moses?

There are two common resolutions to this problem. One way to resolve this is to say that there is a law more comprehensive than the law of Moses. In Romans 2:12-16, Paul has already spoken of a law written on people's hearts and as the Genesis account makes plain (Genesis 6:5-7; 12-13), sin was a very present reality between the entire period of time between Adam and Moses—so much so that God sent the flood upon the earth as a judgment upon the earth's sinful inhabitants. The other interpretation is that since Paul is emphasizing so strongly what Adam did, that he may be referring to the fact that Adam's sin brought death to everybody.¹³ Neither of these interpretations are very satisfactory.

There is also a third interpretation which makes a great deal of sense, and that is the view of several of the Protestant scholastics and was recently re-stated by Meredith Kline.¹⁴ According to this interpretation, Paul is not taking about the course of human history in general. Instead, he is speaking about the administration of the covenants as they unfold in redemptive history. The key here is that we go back to the law-gospel contrast and covenant theology found through Paul's writings and apply these to Paul's comments here. To explain the consequences of sin and death, Paul gives us a brief refresher course in the history of redemption, specifically the history of the covenants.¹⁵

Theology, pp. 95-99

¹³ Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 233.

¹⁴ See Meredith G. Kline, "Gospel Until the Law: Rom 5:13-14 and the Old Covenant" in The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society Vol 34, No. 4 (December 1991), pp. 433 ff.

¹⁵ Thomas Schreiner takes issue with Kline. "Kline provides a creative and ingenious defense for traditional covenant theology in his interpretation of Rom. 5:13-14. Nonetheless, there is paltry evidence in vv. 13-14 to support the idea that Paul is restricting his focus to the covenant community. Nowhere does he even mention the Abrahamic covenant. The interval is broadly designated as that between Adam and Moses (v. 13). The covenant of grace figures large in Kline's interpretation, but one looks in vain for any reference to such a covenant in the text. Also, it is hardly clear that Paul focuses

In Romans 5:12-21, Paul is focusing upon the roles played by Adam and Jesus in redemptive history. Both Adam and Jesus are federal heads of those in the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, respectively. Their obedience or disobedience in these roles is imputed to the many they represent as covenant head. The key to understanding this first digression, then, is to keep the fundamental Pauline distinction between grace and works and law in gospel in mind throughout.¹⁶

Therefore, the first clause of verse 13 should be interpreted as follows: “for sin was in the (whole world) until the law.” Here Paul establishes the limit “until the law” (i.e. the time of Moses). We know from the Genesis account that sin was in the world because Adam broke the covenant of works. Then, in the second half of verse 13, Paul says “now sin is not imputed [NIV–“taken into account”] where law is not in force.” It is vital to notice the emphasis Paul places on grace—the non-imputation of sin, something he stated in Romans 4 of both Abraham who preceded Moses and of David, who followed him. Given the time period, from Adam to Moses, and the fact that grace is in view (sins are not imputed), it is clear that covenant line is in view and this must be referring to all those under the covenant of grace, who are forgiven of their sins, even though sin was in the world this whole time. This means that the covenant of works was still in effect, even before God gave the law to Moses at Sinai.

In the first part of verse 14, Paul writes, “but death reigned from Adam until Moses.” Adam is the head of the covenant of works, while Moses is the recipient of the law at Sinai. This means that Paul is once again describing the time from Adam to Moses, where death reigns because of guilt from Adam’s sin. Death is a key factor in the biblical data, as seen in the genealogies of Genesis 5, where we repeatedly read “and he died.” Death reigned from Adam to Moses because the covenant of works remains in force. People die because they sinned in Adam and were born with a sinful nature which produced actual sins which the Bible tells us brought about the wrath of God. This is the repeated testimony of Israel’s prophets looking back on this very period. In Isaiah 24:5 we read—“*The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant.*” In Hosea 6:7, the prophet declares of Israel: “*Like Adam, they have broken the covenant—they were unfaithful to me there.*” What covenant is that it was broken? It is the covenant of works which God made with Adam.

Notice, in the last part of verse 14, Paul writes that death reigned, “*even over those who did not sin after the mode of the transgression of Adam.*” This stands in sharp contrast to the previous clause in v. 14, but repeats what was said in the last part of v.13. The people in view here were not like Adam and under the covenant of works which had no provision for the forgiveness of sins. Instead, they were under the covenant of grace, since their sin is treated differently than those outside the covenant of grace. For them, there was a gracious provision for the forgiveness of their sins (cf. 13b). Then, in the final clause of verse 14, we read that [Adam] “was a type of the one to come.” Paul now returns to the thought he left off with in Romans 5:12. Adam is the federal head of the race and is the pattern (prototype) of the second Adam, Jesus Christ.

upon those who received grace; he says they died (v. 14). Death is the consequence of sin (Rom. 6:23). Thus, the fact that sin was not reckoned does not mean these people experienced grace. Finally, the most natural way to understand the time interval is to see a reference to all people who lived between Adam and Moses.” See *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), pp. 248-249. I think that all of Schreiner’s objection *are* answered by Kline.

¹⁶ Kline, “Gospel Until the Law,” pp. 433-34.

Therefore, Romans 5:13-14 does not address the history of the world from the fall until Moses. It is Paul's survey of redemptive history from the covenant of works to the new covenant in the fullness of time. Paul fills in the history between the first and last covenants treated in the rest of Romans 5 as Paul maps out the main covenants featured throughout redemptive history, the covenant of works (Adam) and grace (Abraham and Christ) and then the covenant with Moses.¹⁷ It is in light of this history that Paul's readers must understand sin and death, and how we as Christians related to both great enemies now that we are in the covenant of grace and the guilt of our sins is not imputed to us.

In verses 15-17, Paul digresses again, this time focusing upon on the vast dissimilarity between Christ and Adam, before making a comparison between them in v. 18f.¹⁸ The contrast between the disastrous results of Adam's transgression is compared with the wondrous redemption wrought by the second Adam. Since Paul has just told us that Adam was a type of Christ, we should take note of the strong word of contrast—"but" (ἄλλ') which opens verse 15. This indicates that the point of the following will be to contrast Adam's disobedience with Christ's obedience—"But the gift is not like the trespass." Adam and Jesus are alike in certain ways—both are federal heads of the major redemptive covenants—but there are also major differences. Paul's second digression is to contrast Adam's one act of sin with Christ's one act of righteousness. Paul will unpack the meaning of this in subsequent comments. Thus Christ's gift for us is not at all like the trespass of Adam who brought sin, death and destruction upon the race.

Notice that death comes through the sin of Adam not the actual sins of Adam's children—"For if the many died by the trespass of the one man." Therefore, the phrase "because all sinned" refers to all of humanity having sinned in and with Adam. What is significant for Paul is that Adam's sin brought death to the entire human race—the "many" referring to all those whom Adam represents under the covenant of works. Thus Adam's sin had disastrous consequences. It meant death for everyone.¹⁹

But Christ's obedience trumps Adam's disobedience! Paul says "*how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!*" Notice the use of terms indicating contrast. "How much more" does Christ accomplish than Adam undoes. As one writer so aptly puts it, "[The work of Christ] is summed up in the word grace, grace which connects in the first instance with God and in the second with Christ. With grace Paul couples the gift that came by the grace of the one man. The word gift signifies freeness and in the New Testament is used only of God's good gifts to mankind. The freeness is emphasized by the link with grace. This gift came from the one man, which makes it clear that the saving work was accomplished by Christ alone."²⁰ In fact, this gift of grace overflows to the many, i.e., those whom Christ represents under the covenant of grace.

Paul continues the contrast in verses 16-17, when he writes, "*Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift*

¹⁷ Kline, "Gospel Until the Law," p. 437.

¹⁸ Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.284.

¹⁹ Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 235.

²⁰ Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 235.

of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.” This is huge contrast. The gift is gracious—probably referring to the non-imputation of sin described in 13b—and is not like the result of one man’s sin, the imputation of guilt for Adam’s act of rebellion, which brought sin and death upon the race. This is the first four part contrast in which follows.²¹

In the first of these contrasts, Paul writes, *the judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation.* This phrase makes no sense on a Pelagian or semi-Pelagian interpretation. Judgment (death through sin) is brought about by the one act of Adam, not by natural generation or imitation. This supports the historic Protestant interpretation of the passage in that Adam’s one act that is in view throughout the text, not our own acts of sin which spring from our inherited sinful nature. In the second contrast, we read *“but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification.”* The gracious gift of Christ followed many sins and brought justification. Grace is unmerited favor, and God owes us nothing. But God graciously provides “the gift” which is nothing less than the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ!

In the third contrast, Paul writes *“For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man.”* As D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones puts it “the world is a place of cemeteries.”²² No matter how much we may ignore death, we will all die. Barring Christ’s return to earth and the resurrection, death will reign over us as well. Sickness and disease the fruit of Adam’s act of rebellion, reminding us of the hideous reign of death. The result of Adam’s act was a universal disease that infects all of us from head to toe, and even now is at work in us. We are dying this very moment. But in the final contrast, Paul states, *“how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.”*

Paul comes to the main point of his second digression. The dissimilarity between Christ and Adam is now apparent. Adam’s sin which brought sin and death, has been swallowed up by the grace of Christ who in his death through his gift of righteousness will more than merely undo what Adam had done. Those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace will receive the benefits of Christ’s triumph over death and the grave as his righteousness is imputed to them. The reign of sin and death will be destroyed. As Calvin puts it, “the meaning of the whole passage is that since Christ surpasses Adam, the sin of Adam is overcome by the righteousness of Christ. The curse of Adam is overturned by the grace of Christ, and the life which Christ bestows swallows up the death which came from Adam.”²³ The eschatological focus is also in view when it becomes clear that as in Adam we are under the dominion of death, so in Christ we are under the dominion of life, since Christ is the Lord of righteousness.²⁴

²¹ Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 236.

²² Cited in Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, pp. 236-237.

²³ Calvin, The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians, p. 116.

²⁴ Nygren, Commentary on Romans, p. 221. Nygren writes, “Paul’s thought here could be expressed most simply in this way: If the dominion of death was great in Adam’s race, the dominion of life shall be much greater still for those who are Christ’s. But Paul expresses himself in another way. The reason is not hard to find. There is another difference between the dominions of death and life which he would not pass without notice. Death is a power of destruction, a tyrant under which man lives and in whose bondage he finds himself. And life is also a power, under which man is set by Christ; but it is not a tyrant. For him who is subject to the dominion of life, the bondage is past; he is free. That

Having digressed twice, Paul now completes the sentence broken off in verse 12. In verse 18 Paul writes, *“Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men.”* Paul now restates the basic thought of verse 12b. One trespass of Adam brought condemnation (guilt) for all men. While this is a difficult sentence in Greek—there is no verb so it has to be supplied to make sense in English—the result is clear. Adam’s act brought condemnation on all men. The way in which Adam’s one act brings condemnation, is not by imitation, nor natural generation, but by imputation. Adam acted as federal head of the entire human race, and therefore, the guilt of Adam’s sin is reckoned, credited or imputed to all of his descendants. All have sinned in Adam and all have been condemned by virtue of what Adam has done.

But just as Adam brought death on all men (those under the covenant of works) so Christ’s one act of righteousness means justification for all men (under the covenant of grace). Here again the Greek is difficult to translate, but the NIV correctly sees Paul setting out an antithesis between one trespass (Adam’s) and Christ’s one act of obedience. Christ’s one act of righteousness brings life to all those whom he represents as head of the covenant of grace, the same as Adam’s act of condemnation, which condemns all those whom he presents. [[Since those who are given the sentence of justification are also given the sentence of justification to life in the age to come, the “all men” here clearly cannot be referring to all men inclusive (i.e., “each and every”). The “all men” here, are the same as “the many” of verse 15, and the same group who receive the gift of the righteousness in Christ in v. 17. The “all men” are clearly those under the covenant of grace, whose sin is not imputed to them (v. 13b). The same thing will be in view in verse 19 as well. There is either a universal justification in view, or else the group in view is qualified by the covenant motif and the limitation of union with Christ through faith.]]

In verse 19, Paul says, *For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.* Note the careful balance in Paul’s analogy between the two parts of the sentence—“Just as” . . . through Adam, “so also” . . . through Christ. Clearly, “the many,” in the first clause are those under the covenant of works, and who were made sinners by virtue of Adam’s act of rebellion. Neither their own sin or that of their parents is in view here, effectively refuting Pelagian and semi-Pelagian schemes. The many “were made” sinners by virtue of the fact that the guilt for Adam’s one act of rebellion is imputed to all of his progeny. It is also the same way in which the many are accounted righteous in the last half of the verse. Imputation (as a reckoning or crediting) must be in view here. By virtue of Adam’s one act of sin, all of those whom he represents are declared guilty in and with him. His guilt is imputed to them.

What follows is the perfect complement to the previous clause. Through the perfect obedience of Christ and his fulfilling of the demands of the law, and in his sacrificial death for sinners, Christ’s obedience is likewise imputed to all of those he represents under the covenant of grace. The many will be made righteous by virtue of imputation of Christ’s righteousness to them, and not by virtue of an inward transformation. Through the one act of Adam all (under the covenant of works) are reckoned as sinners. So also through the obedience of Christ, the many (those under the covenant of grace) will be reckoned or credited as righteous. This, of course, is the basis for doctrine of justification.

difference between the realms of death and of life determines Paul’s formulation; it is the reason why he adopts a construction different from what we would expect. When he speaks of death, he only talks of its dominion; for they who are subject to that have no share in the dominion; they are simply slaves. But as to life he expresses himself differently. As to those who from Christ receive grace and the free gift of righteousness, he says that they ‘will in life.’ Here, too, the realm of life shows its infinite superiority.”

Now reaching the climax of his argument—which he began in a narrow sense in 5:12, but when viewed in broader context, is the summation of all that Paul has said in 3:21 and following—the focus is no longer on Adam and Christ in contrast. Paul makes a simple and straight forward statement about what Christ has done for us in breaking the reign of sin and death, the effects of Adam’s one act. And so wrapping up in verses 20-21, Paul says *“The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

Interestingly enough, Paul makes reference to the law, in effect tying this section back to his comments made in Romans 2-4. The law was not given to prevent sin. Instead the was given to increase sin! For the law can only condemn us. It offers to us no enabling power to help us fulfill its demands. The law excites our sinful nature, causing our own intrinsic sinfulness to increase under the law’s demands. This is a theme that Paul will expound in great detail a bit later (Rom 7). Now contrasting sin and grace, Paul tells us that grace “super-abounded”! God overcomes the effects of sin (the reign of both sin and death), his grace superabounding for all of those who are in Christ. This superabounding grace liberates us from the tyranny of sin and death. All of this centers upon the freeness and graciousness of God’s activity in providing for our deliverance. God owes us nothing. But when we were dead in sin, unwilling and unable to come to him, God graciously poured out his mercy on us in the person of His Son. In the face of the reign of sin and death, the grace of God superabounds!

Those who were dead in sin, who would not seek God and who were not righteous are now promised the victory over the tyrants of sin and death. Those who were under the tyranny of death (the covenant of works) are now instead under the reign of life (the covenant of grace). Superabounding grace comes to us so as to overthrow the reign of death. Sin has enslaved us. It holds us fast. We cannot break free. So, Paul says, sin reigns over all those in Adam.²⁵ But it is precisely this two-headed tyranny that Jesus Christ came to destroy! As Paul reminds us, it is through Jesus Christ that the new age of salvation dawns, when we are liberated us from the tyranny of sin and death. Christ now reigns in the lives of his people, instead of sin.²⁶

And because Christ reigns in righteousness, we have eternal life in him. He is the second Adam whose obedience earned for us that grace which superabounds, not only restoring to us what we lost in Adam, but which gives so much more. In Jesus Christ, we who are ungodly sinners, will receive all the riches and treasure of heaven. And all of this comes through the obedience of the one man, in which the grace of God superabounds! Amen.

²⁵ Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 242.

²⁶ Nygren, Commentary on Romans, pp. 228-229.

The Structure of Romans 5:12-21

RO 5:12 Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man [A]
and death through sin [B],

chiasmus: sin [A] > death [B]; death [B] > sin [a]

and in this way death came to all men [B],
because all sinned [A] --

[Paul begins with the *protasis* (the condition of a conditional sentence) in verse 12, but the *apodosis* is broken off and not completed until v. 18b]

[Paul suddenly digresses to explain the meaning of the verb "sinned" in verse 13, 14]

5:13 for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. 5:14 Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come.

[Paul digresses again to explain the similarity/dissimilarity between Adam and Christ in vv. 15-17]

5:15 But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! 5:16 Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. 5:17 For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

[Paul now returns to the *apodosis*, completing the *protasis* left open in v. 12]:

RO 5:18 Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men.

[Verse 19 then follows as an explanation of v. 18]

RO 5:19 For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

[Verses 20, 21 explain the part played by the law in God's purpose]

RO 5:20 The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, 5:21 so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might

reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Murray agrees with Cranfield,²⁷ as does Morris, that this is indeed the way in which Paul sets his arguments. In the heat of writing or dictating the letter, Paul introduces the main point in 5:12, "because all sinned," and then almost immediately he digresses, adding new two points - one regarding the meaning of "sinned" in v. 12, and then secondly, showing the great degree of contrast between the two figures - without finishing the point he began to make in verse 12. Therefore, in order to correctly interpret the meaning of the key and disputed phrase, "because all sinned" in verse 12, the explanation of Paul's original assertion is to be found in verses 18-19, where he completes his original thought.

The structure (and translation) for Romans 5:13-14 that Kline sets out can be illustrated as follows:

13a. "For sin was in the (whole world) until the law" (cf. the explanation in 14b) - Here the limit "until the law" is established (i.e. "before Moses"). Sin was in the world because Adam broke the covenant of works.

13b. "Now sin is not imputed where law is not in force" (cf. *Psalm 32:1-2c*; also *Romans 4:7-8*) - notice the emphasis on grace, i.e. the non-imputation of sin. Therefore the covenant line must be in view and this must be referring to those under the Covenant of Grace.

14a. "but death reigned from Adam" [who stands at the end of the covenant of works and at the beginning of the covenant of grace] "to Moses" [Paul is here giving a description of the patriarchal age, where death (because of guilt from Adam's sin) figures as a key factor in the Biblical data. Moses then is the key figure in the coming of the Old Covenant (with the giving of the law), and he marks the end of the patriarchal age].

14b. "even over those who did not sin after the mode of the transgression of Adam" (cf. *Isaiah 24-26, especially 24:5*; *Hosea 6:7*; *Jer. 31:23*; and especially *Romans 4:15b*). This stands in marked contrast to the previous clause 14a, but in essence repeats what was said in 13b. The people in view here were not like Adam and under the covenant of works which had no provision for forgiveness, but instead under the covenant of grace, since sin was treated differently and there was a provision of forgiveness for them (cf. 13b).

14c. "Who was a type of the one to come" -- Paul returns to the thought he left off with in Romans 5:12, Adam is the federal head of the race and stands as the pattern of the Second Adam, Jesus Christ.

Thus the context indicates that the parenthesis should be seen as follows:

The parenthesis in Rom 5:13-14 sits then in the middle of a chapter that as a whole surveys history from the covenant of creation [Kline's term for the Covenant of Works]

²⁷ Murray, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin*, pp. 7-8. Murray calls verses 13-17 a "parenthesis."

to the new covenant in the fullness of time. As the parenthesis elaborates on the reign of sin / death mentioned in verse 12, it naturally continues this covenantal structuring. This is signaled, as we have noted, by the phrases "until the law" (v. 13a) and "from Adam to Moses" (v 14a). By these allusions to the patriarchal / Abrahamic and law epochs the parenthesis fills in the history between the first and last covenants treated in the rest of Romans 5, so completing the cosmic mural of the four major covenant epochs.²⁸

These are the Covenant of Works/Grace, the Abrahamic Covenant and the Covenant with Moses, as successive administrations of the Covenants.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 437.